RUNEQUEST

BY STEVE PERRIN AND FRIENDS

Runequest *is a role-playing fantasy adventure game. We are publishing excerpts from* Runequest *plus commentary to aid beginners in playing this game.* If you want to play along, we suggest you get your own copy of* Runequest *from The Chaosium, P.O. Box 6302, Dept. P, Albany, CA 94706. Price: $8.*

Last time, we showed you "How to Create an Adventurer," by using three six-sided dice (3D6) or a simple computer program to roll the seven basic characteristics of STRENGTH (STR), INTELLIGENCE (INT), POWER (POW), CONSTITUTION (CON), DEXTERITY (DEX), CHARISMA (CHA) and SIZE (SIZ). Here, from Runequest, *is an example of a human adventurer, known as Rurik the Restless.*

THE SAGA OF RURIK THE RESTLESS

To provide a running series of examples for the reader, we will be presenting the Saga of Rurik the Restless throughout this book. For now, let's roll up his characteristics . . .

STR=12

This is a high average STR, allowing him to handle most weapons and wear any armor. Chapter IV, Combat Skills, gives more detail on these limits.

INT=16

This is a very good roll. As you will see later, it gives him a number of advantages in gaining expertise in skills and lets him memorize a goodly number of spells.

POW=12

Again, this is a high average roll. When he learns magic, he will have a good number of "Power Points" to put into it, his chance of influencing others with his magic is decent, and he has a reasonable defense. Again, for more detail see Chapter V, Basic Magic.

CON=16

Another excellent roll. He will be able to soak up a fair amount of damage, and has a better than average chance of surviving things like poison, disease, etc.

DEX=6

You can't win them all. Our boy Rurik is starting out clumsy. This detracts from his chances of hitting and getting a parry in the way of a weapon, but fortunately DEX can be improved, as the muscles and reflexes are trained.

CHA=10

At this point, Rurik has an average chance of persuading someone to follow him anywhere, and is sometimes persuasive. Remember, this has nothing to do with looks.

SIZ=12

In Twentieth Century America, this puts him at about 5'10", high average height, and perhaps 155 lbs.

MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM CHARACTERISTICS

No characteristics may be increased for *any* reason (including magic or divine intervention) beyond the maximum amount rollable on the characteristic dice (18 for humans) plus the amount of dice rolled (3 for humans). Thus, no human may have any characteristics higher than 21.

The minimum characteristic possible for *any* reason is the number of dice rolled (3 for humans). No characteristic may be reduced below this point.

RURIK'S POTENTIAL INCREASES

INT and SIZ

Failing an act of the Gods or the intercession of Lady Luck, Rurik is stuck with what he has. Fortunately, what he has is, in the form of INT, very good, and the SIZ is reasonable.

STR

Thanks to his CON of 16, Rurik's STR can be increased, as explained later, to a maximum of 16.

POW and DEX

These two attributes can be increased to species maximum eventually. With DEX, Rurik has a long way to go.

CON

Because it is the highest of the three of STR, CON, and SIZ, this characteristic cannot be changed. It's fortunate that it is as high as it is.

CHA

As shown later, Rurik's CHA, too, will rise and fall with events.

Rurik's adventures begin on page 11 of Runequest and continue throughout the book. We will bid farewell to Rurik and, instead, create Rurik's identical twin brother, known as Rikur the Rambler.

Rikur, as you may suspect, begins with exactly the same basic characterists as Rurik!

Rikur the Rambler
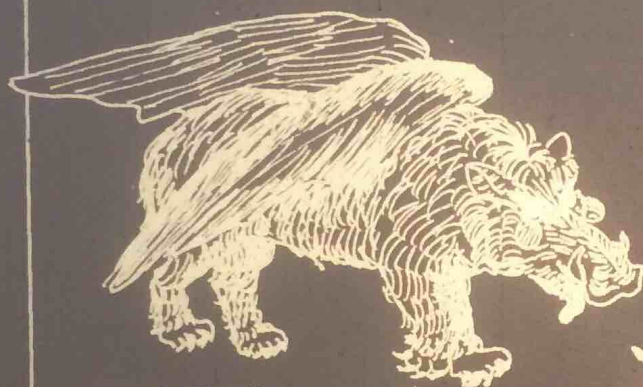
Ok, Start a file on Rikur

STR = 12   DEX = 6
INT = 16   CHA = 10
POW = 12   SIZ = 12
CON = 16

Rikur is about 16 years old and has accumulated a few lunars (the monetary unit of Runequest). He plans to go adventuring. So, Rikur wants to buy weapons to defend himself from ruffians and monsters along the way. Remember, though, that he is young and untrained in combat. Let's look on page 23 of Runequest to find out something about the cost of weapons and about Rikur's chances of success in using them.

HOW COMBAT WORKS

THE ATTACK

In RUNEQUEST, an Adventurer has a certain probability of succeding with an attack. If the player rolls the character's needed percentage or less on D100, the character has succeeded and managed to hit his opponent.

How much damage this hit does depends on the type of Weapon Damage and what kind of armor the target may be wearing to absorb the damage.

THE PARRY

The Adventurer also has the opportunity of parrying with shield or weapon. This chance is again rolled on D100 and, if the needed percentage to parry or less is rolled, the parry will block the attack, whether it was successful or not.

BASIC CHANCES

The Basic Chance for most attacks or parries (and most skills) is 5%.

A roll of 01-05 on D100 will *always* mean a successful attack or parry. Conversely, a roll of 96-00 on D100 will *always* mean an unsuccessful attempt at whatever is being attempted.

D100? Well, you can roll D100 by using two icosahedral (20-sided) dice. These are sometimes called percentile dice; the twenty sides are labelled 0 through 9, with each numeral appearing twice. Use one die for the tens digit and the other for the ones digit. If you roll 00, call it 100. Or, of course, you can use the computer to generate a random integer in the range 1 to 100.

SPECIAL BASIC CHANCES

Certain weapons can be used with a Basic Chance higher than 5%, due to simplicity of handling and common use within the culture. The following list shows the Basic Chance to attack *and* parry with each of these weapons.

The table, on page 23 of Runequest, lists 22 weapons. Here are a few examples.

WEAPON	% CHANCE
Medium Shield *	10
Spear	10
Shortsword	15
Large Shield *	20
Dagger	25
Fist **	25
Kick **	25

*Parry only
**Attack only

So, let's see about outfitting Rikur with some weaponry. Page 28 is a table of WEAPONS, TRAINING COSTS, PRICES AND OTHER STATISTICS. Here are some samples.

WEAPON	STR	DEX	DAMAGE	PRICE
Spear	9	7	1D6+1	10
Shortsword	—	—	1D6+1	10
Dagger	—	—	1D6	15
Fist	—	—	1D3	—
Kick	—	—	1D6	—

STRENGTH—Strength necessary for a character to have to be able to use such a shield.
ABSORBS—The shield will absorb this number of points per attack before the user takes damage.
25%/50%/75%—Serves the same function as it does in the weapons chart. Again, any ability beyond 75% must be gained from Experience, not Training.
PRICE—The standard Price for a shield. Fancy ones cost more.

EXPLANATION OF HEADINGS

STR/DEX—The minimum necessary STR and DEX to be able to handle the weapon. A lack in DEX can be made up by an excess in STR, on a two-for-one basis. For instance, Rurik lacks one DEX Point of being able to use the Spear one-handed. Fortunately, he has a STR of 12, which is three over the nine needed. The extra point of DEX is made up with two points of Rurik's STR.

DAMAGE DONE—This is expressed as a Dice Roll (such as 2D6) plus, in many cases, an additional point or two of damage. Thus, the damage done by a Short Sword is found by rolling D6 and adding one to the result. The damage ranges between 2 and 7 points.

PRICE—This is the price of the weapon itself. It is a standard price and a better quality weapon could be offered at a higher price. Of course, "better quality" may just mean gaudier. . .

And, from page 30, some info on shields.

SIZE	STRENGTH	ABSORBS	PRICE
Medium	9 +	12	10L
Large	12 +	16	20
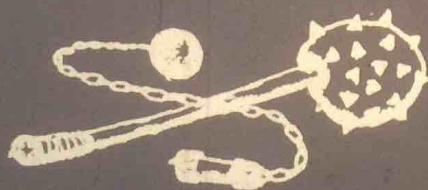
SIZE—Relative size of shield. A Small Shield is about 30-35 centimeters in diameter and held with one handgrip. It is called a buckler.
A Medium Shield is about 60 cm in diameter, equivalent to the ancient Greek Round shield, or the Medieval knight's "heater."
A Large Shield is the equivalent of the Foot Shields of the Greeks and Romans, or the Norman Kite Shield and the Viking Round.

Rikur, who is not wealthy, decides to buy a shortsword, a dagger and a medium shield for a total price of 35 lunars. Of course, he already has built-in hands and feet, which cost him nothing.

KEEPING TRACK OF RIKUR

Now we need a way to keep track of Rikur. Here is what we know about him so far.

NAME	RIKUR				
STR	12	**WEAPONS**			
INT	16	TYPE	Attack %	Damage	Parry %
POW	12	Shortsword	15	1D6+1	15
CON	16	Dagger	25	1D6	25
DEX	6	Fist	25	1D3	—
CHA	10	Kick	25	1D6	—
SIZ	12				
		SHIELD			
		SIZE		Absorbs	Parry %
		Medium		12	10

Rikur's record, of course, will grow much larger. In a game of Runequest, there will be many records! So, start thinking about how to build a Runequest data base management system. See you next time. □

EPIC GAMES
# for Modest Computers

BY ARTHUR WELLS, JR.

Arthur lists his address as 1171 Cragmont Ave, Berkeley, CA, 94708. It seems he is a barrister who also has interests in computers, fantasy role-playing games, humor (see his letter in the Jan/Feb 1979 issue of RC) and much more. He requests that you fill his mailbox with replies about this article. He asks that the person who filled his mailbox with sand please discontinue correspondence. He asks that I stop this . . . —RZ

The article "Epic Computer Games," which appeared in the March-April 1978 issue of this magazine, is, as far as I am concerned, one of the best articles so far written on what games need to be. The article has some good concrete suggestions for implementing games and touches on a variety of topics, each of which needs much exploring. I also found it fitting that the article should appear in *RC*, which has always presented the pedestrian detail of programming with gusto and has usually tried for as much inventiveness as has been thus far possible in the recreational computer field.

It seems to me that the Epic Game is already well within reach and that within two years we could have some great games going. But I think this is going to require some attention to what the market makes available and to some of the realistic limitations on home computer use.

I come from a completely different background than the authors of other games articles. I learned BASIC at the Lawrence Hall of Science time-sharing system at Berkeley a few years ago, played all the games there, and for about a year have had my own home computer, which is an Apple II. I started with tape and now have a disc drive, and I have gone from 16K to 48K memory on board. I understand machine language programming, but have done little of it and I favor it only if speed or some other advantage presents itself as the *clear* choice. I have had exposure to other high level languages, so (I think) I grasp the different bases on which computer languages can be constructed.
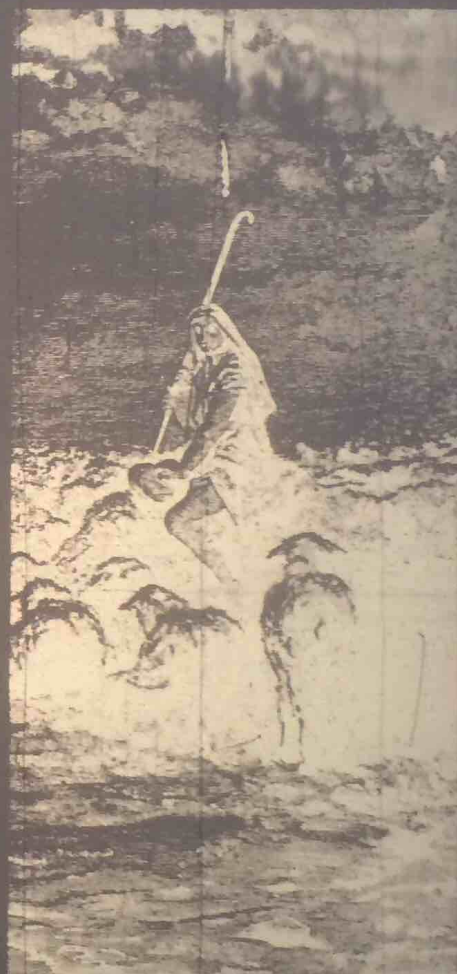
However, I have never written a program in FORTRAN or COBOL, nor have I ever had the opportunity to play with a big, really fast, powerful machine with 32 bit words and oodles and reams of memory. It is unlikely that I will ever get that opportunity, and I probably would be frozen into inaction if I were. In other words, I am just a hobbyist.

From this perspective, I have the following observations about Epic Games on home computers.

One BASIC. I have no doubt that we are going to have these games written in BASIC. Radio Shack, Commodore, Apple, Texas Instruments, and everyone else has already made a big commitment to BASIC. There are a lot of good books out to teach the language and the language is fundamentally easy to learn. The programs will obviously need an extended BASIC. What is needed most is *one common BASIC syntax* to run on all the different computers. The present situation where each vendor has a different dialect but any one can be made to say the same thing as any other is stupid and should soon become intolerable. One of the purposes of inventing the higher level languages was that programs not be chip- or machine-bound. Other languages have some useful functions but I believe we will have to contend with BASIC.

N-Dimensional Adventurers. One of the most exciting things about Epic-type games is the possibility of users defining their own player characteristics. It seems to me we already have the capacity to start developing complex personalities, even with limited memory, by using multi-dimensional matrices. Many of the advanced BASICs permit matrices of n dimensions, and, as I understand it, this means that a large number of characteristics can be related to a large number of other characteristics. So we can have characters with a dimension which moves them to tears by sorrow, or happiness, or relief, or frustration or anger, while simultaneously being sick, healthy, married, single, etc. Whether tearful or not, their anger can be simmering or violent — or anywhere in between.

It also seems to me that these personality matrices could be made to interact with situational or positional matrices (or both), so that the outcome is often not predictable. Obviously, the situational or positional (e.g. characteristics of a location) matrices can be complex or simple.

I think some intense work is going to have to be done on decision trees or matrix interactions, so that much more than simple branches are available to determine the action taken as a result of player/object/place interaction. The simple tree itself seems of little value for more than the "which-fork-in-the-road" decision. There must be many other

ways. For instance, most BASICs allow for at least a dozen nested loops, and I don't see why player/action can't be determined either by loop groups or a series of loops.

Modular Gaming. The notion that people, objects and places are defined by sets of characteristics makes for a modular set-up. This means that the same game or situation can become entirely different with different players and places. Assuming appropriate hardware (discussed later), each person/place/object could be a separate table/disc/tape. In this way, the game itself, i.e., the procedures available, could be kept short and simple (and perhaps in memory) but the game would vary greatly because of player/object characteristics. A game of football between the Raiders and the Rams would be vastly different than football between dragons and glorps (glorps are whatever you imagine), but the rules are the same.

Carry-A-Culture. This modular notion also suggests that the mere user can become quickly but completely involved. All this would seem to require is separate programs which ask a lot of questions, the answers to which create the matrix or table that defines the person/object. Within the limits imposed by the game to be played, the user can define himself or anything else as male/female, timid/aggressive, etc. He could choose passivism over aggression. And so on.

If this modular system can work, and if vendors will agree on a common syntax, then we can carry our small cultures and their inhabitants to friends' houses for interactive play. That is, if the necessary hardware is available, which is what we need to discuss next.

Hardware Support. Much of the hardware for really super games is already or soon will be available on microcomputers. As of now the following is available on at least some systems:

- Low resolution (40 X 40 grid) graphics in at least 15 colors.

- High-resolution graphics running up to 300 X 300 dot resolution in at least a half dozen colors.
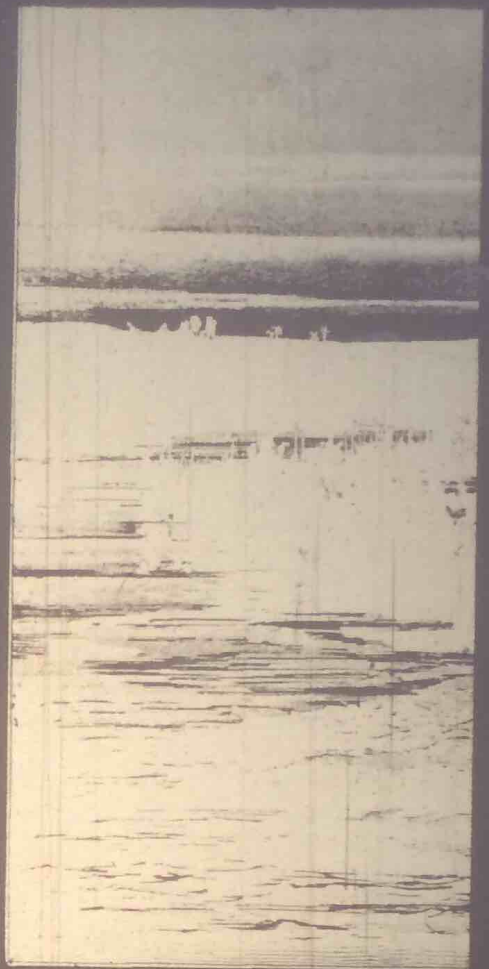
- Hardware which permits you to get the computer to respond to between 32 and 64 different voice commands.

- Sound reproduction which will simulate five octaves of normal tones, all types of war or Starwars-like sounds, screeches, burps, bells and whistles, etc.

- Voice modules which are user-created, on call, can make sounds of struggle, grunts, sighs or regular speech. (Thus far the fidelity is poor.) On the Apple, the program was developed by Bob Bishop and Bill Depew of Softape and modified by Andy Hertzfeld, a graduate student at Cal.

- The Apple II can play chords of up to four notes with simple hardware.

- Speaker output from the microcomputer can go through your high fidelity/stereo equipment.

- There is presently equipment made by Mountain Hardware which will let your micro turn on and off lights,

alarms, etc., in your house. Thus your Epic Game can affect your whole apartment (. . . or cave?).

- By next year, Mountain Hardware says it will have biofeedback equipment which will work through the micros. This, theoretically, means control by skin response, heart beat or alpha waves.

Obviously, a mountain of work needs to be done both on hardware and software to bring these capabilities to many systems and at a decent price. The point I want to make here is that the home computer field is already fecund. Epic games could already be tending toward the ultimately desirable characteristic: outrageousness.

A Bottleneck. The biggest problem which seems to be current is how to access all this capability on the micro. Obviously, 4K is not enough; 16K is a minimum; 48K onboard better. But a really flexible and interactive system (player/player/machine) will not be realistic until we have disc storage with truly random access. I do not believe

anyone cares about micro-second responses. Five to ten second response would be adequate, especially if we had something in between to keep us entertained (such as a screen display). With disc storage, random access and decent onboard memory, we should be able to have fairly elaborate and interesting games.

Future Stuff. How about micro owners playing with each other? Modems will obviously be available and cheap, but phone lines cost money and prevent incoming calls. I cannot conceive a large computer sitting somewhere dedicated only to epic games. So it seems to me that the following are reasonable probabilities:

- Phone lines are used but an interrupt is built in to notify about incoming calls;

- People's micros are portable and can interface with each other at each other's homes; and

- People should be able to play at home without others; and micros have multiple keyboards so that two or

three players can all get into a home game. Further, the home set-up must be such that people can develop their own player/object/place matrix modules at leisure and at home, and then try them out. Disc is the only answer to this, and it will have to be true random access.

Summary. Let me finish this article with two minor observations. The first is that there definitely should be different levels of play for different age/maturity groups. In my experience, children 8-12 are going to feel a lot less restrained about suggesting or trying changes which adults would either not think of or would fail to suggest for fear of criticism. The future of the truly inventive and creative game lies in the hands of those untroubled by peer criticism.

Lastly, every game incorporates moral judgments. Whether knights protect maidens or kill them can involve moral judgments. So can definitions of "winning." The importance we give these judgments can be separated from the judgments. The key thing is that the program should not unduly punish failure or an obviously morally wrong decision.

For instance, Apple puts out a game called "Noah's Ark." It is a "hangman" game, except that the words to guess are all biblical. If you miss a letter the ark starts to sink. If you fail to guess the word in the requisite number of guesses, the ark sinks. Thereafter, a sea of blue appears on the screen and an upside down human body "glub-glub-glubs" to the bottom. If you win you get a printed "You live . . . for now." Peter Rowe of LHS has lucidly observed that the reward for failure exceeds the reward for success. One can see that this tendency definitely must be curbed so that rewards for success—either visually or vocally or in terms of game "currency"—exceed those of failure. This may require overcoming a natural tendency to make failure visually and aurally more interesting than success.

Dozens of other ideas probably come to your mind at this time. However, this article must end somewhere and this seems like a good point. I insist on hearing responses, and you should all feel guilty if you do not innundate my mailbox with replies.   □

DRAGON SMOKE...
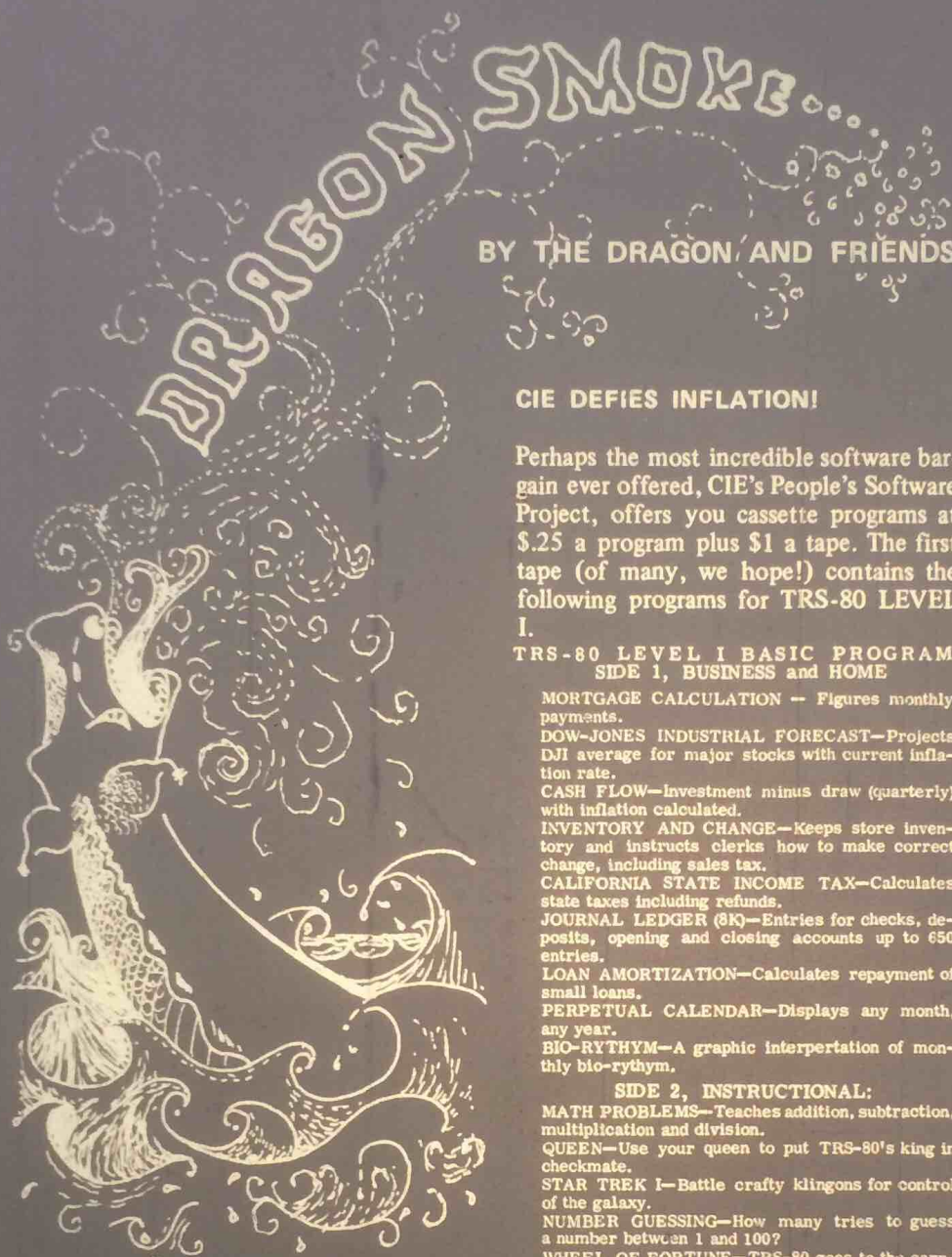
BY THE DRAGON AND FRIENDS

CIE DEFIES INFLATION!

Perhaps the most incredible software bargain ever offered, CIE's People's Software Project, offers you cassette programs at $.25 a program plus $1 a tape. The first tape (of many, we hope!) contains the following programs for TRS-80 LEVEL I.

TRS-80 LEVEL I BASIC PROGRAMS
SIDE 1, BUSINESS and HOME

MORTGAGE CALCULATION -- Figures monthly payments.

DOW-JONES INDUSTRIAL FORECAST—Projects DJI average for major stocks with current inflation rate.

CASH FLOW—Investment minus draw (quarterly) with inflation calculated.

INVENTORY AND CHANGE—Keeps store inventory and instructs clerks how to make correct change, including sales tax.

CALIFORNIA STATE INCOME TAX—Calculates state taxes including refunds.

JOURNAL LEDGER (8K)—Entries for checks, deposits, opening and closing accounts up to 650 entries.

LOAN AMORTIZATION—Calculates repayment of small loans.

PERPETUAL CALENDAR—Displays any month, any year.

BIO-RYTHYM—A graphic interperation of monthly bio-rythym.

SIDE 2, INSTRUCTIONAL:

MATH PROBLEMS—Teaches addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

QUEEN—Use your queen to put TRS-80's king in checkmate.

STAR TREK I—Battle crafty klingons for control of the galaxy.

NUMBER GUESSING—How many tries to guess a number between 1 and 100?

WHEEL OF FORTUNE—TRS-80 goes to the carnival with dazzling graphics.

WORLD WAR II BOMBER—Fly with the aces of the glorious past.

ROCK, SCISSORS, PAPER—Modern version of an old favorite.

SEEK—A challenging game using basic planar geometry.

STAR TREK III (6K)—A good space game using galaxy maps, sensors, and navagational skill.

RED BARON—Graphic flight to get the old kraut.

MINI-TREK—Compact but challenging version of the popular game.

STRATEGY—Keep track of your armed forces against the enemy.

PILOT—Above average skill is needed to land this plane.

BATTLESHIP—An excellent search game using coordinate geometry.

ON A SNOWY EVENING....—Delightful graphic of Robert Frost's poem.

From: Computer Information Exchange
P.O. Box 158
San Luis Rey, CA 92068

Price: $7.50 plus $.50 postage and handling. California residents add 6% sales tax.

FREE! CIE TRS-80 BULLETIN

This educational bulletin is **free** from Computer Information Exchange, a non-profit corporation dedicated to free or inexpensive good things for people everywhere. CIE is one of the best sources of information for people who wish to learn how to use, program and enjoy computers. Write for a free copy or even a free subscription. (Do it even if you don't have a TRS-80 or even if you don't yet have a computer!)

From: Computer Information Exchange
P.O. Box 158
San Luis Rey, CA 92068

Price: FREE

A NON-VIOLENT SPACE GAME

Available soon, a non-violent space game from the World Future Society. We haven't seen it or played it yet, so we will simply pass on what *they* say about it.

Most games depicting humanity's ventures into space involve exploitation of other planets and warfare among the players for domination of space. Space Future is based on a cooperative approach. Players individually venture into space on peaceful missions and assist each other in settling and developing other planets. The game equipment consists of a large playing surface, a map of outer space with several planets along with resource tokens and several decks of playing cards containing directives and information. Ages: 10 and up.

Hmmm . . . Perhaps the Don Quixote Starship will soar again.

From: Book Service
World Future Society
4916 St. Elmo Avenue
Washington, DC 20014

Price: $9.50 plus $1.50 for postage and handling.

CHINESE DRAGON POSTER

2. *Tien Lung,* Celestial Dragon. Guards the mansions of the gods and supports them. Chases a pearl.

Tien Lung, The Celestial Dragon, came from the poster of *Chinese Dragons* published by W. M. Hawley, 8200 Gould Avenue, Hollywood, CA 90046. This poster has 41 dragons. You can get it in two sizes: 17 x 22 for $0.50; 22 x 30 for $1. Add 20% for postage and handling and, if you live in California, 6% tax.

A NEW FRP MAGAZINE

Last issue we told you about a new magazine, *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, devoted to fantasy role-playing games. *Sorcerer's Apprentice* comes from the folks at Flying Buffalo in Scottsdale, Arizona. Since that report, another FRP magazine, *Different Worlds*, has made its debut.

Different Worlds is produced by The Chaosium of Albany, California, the same group that brought you *Runequest*, *Authentic Thaumaturgy* (see "Dragonsmoke," Nov-Dec 1978), and other magical adventures. *Different Worlds* is billed as "a new magazine of game role-playing . . . an authoritative journal that no dedicated gamemaster should do without . . . featuring articles on Dungeons and Dragons, Tunnels and Trolls, Chivalry and Sorcery, Traveller, Runequest, and a host of others!"

Regular features will include "My Life and Role-Playing" by prominent FRP hobbyists, product reviews, fantasy and sci-fi artwork, new campaigns, gossip, guest editorials, and more!

Different Worlds, appearing bimonthly, is available for $9 a year from: The Chaosium, P.O. Box 6302, Albany, CA 94706.

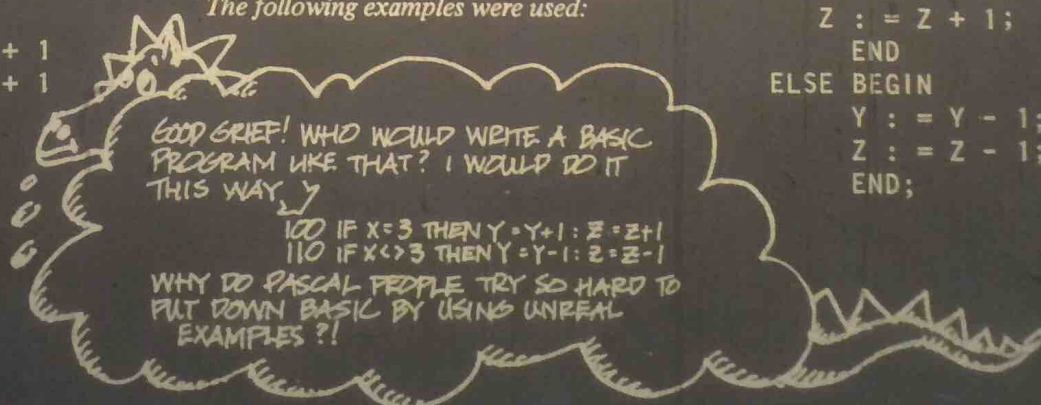©1978 The Chaosium

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THE DRAGON IS UPSET!

BASIC

```
100 IF X = 3 THEN 500
200 LET Y = Y - 1
300 LET Z = Z - 1
400 GO TO 700
500 LET Y = Y + 1
600 LET Z = Z + 1
700 REM
```

The programming (?) examples here appeared in Northwest Computer News, *3-11, Dec. 1978, page 3, in an article by Joe Felsenstein, titled "Back to BASIC." The article attempted to show how PASCAL is obviously better than BASIC. The following examples were used:*

PASCAL

```
IF X = 3
THEN BEGIN
    Y : = Y + 1;
    Z : = Z + 1;
    END
ELSE BEGIN
    Y : = Y - 1;
    Z : = Z - 1;
    END;
```

GOOD GRIEF! WHO WOULD WRITE A BASIC PROGRAM LIKE THAT? I WOULD DO IT THIS WAY

```
100 IF X=3 THEN Y=Y+1 : Z=Z+1
110 IF X<>3 THEN Y=Y-1 : Z=Z-1
```

WHY DO PASCAL PEOPLE TRY SO HARD TO PUT DOWN BASIC BY USING UNREAL EXAMPLES ?!

INTERESTING, BUT NOT RECOMMENDED

While the animated film *The Lord of the Rings* is, in certain respects, interesting, it does not measure up to Tolkien's work of the same name. There are certainly many superficial similarities between the film and the book, but ultimately the film does not tell the same story. This is not in itself bad. However, the film suffers by comparison, and confirmed Tolkien fans will find much to scream about.

A brief rundown on the changes, omissions and errors in the film for people who know the book:

• About five chapters have been removed from the first book. Most of leaving the Shire, all of Backland, Tom Bombadil and the Barrowdowns are left out. There are also innumerable minor changes and omissions. For example, Gandalf's flash of light when Bilbo disappears at his party is left out; Legolas rather than Glorfindel meets Frodo & Co. on their way to Rivendell; the fight with wolves on the way to Moria is omitted; the whole Legolas-Gemli rivalry is left out; and so on.

• The characterizations are almost all inconsistent with those in the book. Motivations become obscure.

• The main fault of the film—apart from having diminished the story line—is its visual technique. Three techniques are used—full animation, lightly painted-in film and something that looks like color filters with other jazz. The intermingling of methods gives the film a rather uneven feel, compounded by the portrayal of certain characters (e.g. the Black Riders) in different techniques at different times. This does nothing for continuity—and must be very confusing if you don't know the story.

• Plenty of things and people *look* wrong: Orthanc, Samwise, Galadriel, the Orcs. The last two especially are *very* wrong; I mean Galadriel doesn't even look pretty!

However, the visual aspects are also what made the film somewhat interesting. The techniques have some potential, even if they did not work well here. The pure animation seemed to go downhill as the film went along, with some aspects of the final scene (the Battle of Helm's Deep) coming across as crude and amateurish—at least to me. On the whole I would not recommend this movie.

Reviewed by Eryk Vershen
Palo Alto, CA

THE KID'S REVIEW: VIDEOBRAIN

VideoBrain Computer Co.
2950 Patrick Henry Drive
Santa Clara, CA 95050
(408) 988-3020

OLD DAD'S WORDS

Phyllis Cole, in the May-June 1978 issue of *PC*, discussed the VideoBrain computer and some of the cartridge programs that come with the system. We recently received a VideoBrain from Umtech, Inc. (the parent company of VideoBrain Computer Co.) for additional use and review. Since we already had an adult perspective on the product, I decided to let my two sons, ages 8 and 9, use the system for about a month and then solicit their reactions. Their responses to the questions of what they liked/disliked about the computer follow.

It is interesting that all of their reactions deal totally with the software packages of the system. They never mention particulars about the machine itself—the joysticks, the keyboard or the fact that it interfaces with the television set. In fact, all I did was connect the machine to the TV and let them and their friends start using the system. I did not tell them anything about the packages, how the joysticks worked or other such detail. They discovered all of that information by working with the machine.

Each software package has a printed user guide. The children sometimes refer to the guides when they first try a package. They seldom read much of the data in the guide. More often, they simply type a response to the request for an input and see what happens. If they have difficulty learning how the game works by entering responses, they turn to the guide. If the guide is too complex, they go to another game or package.

One last comment before we get to the children's remarks: the order of their responses indicates which programs they play more often. The first program on the list, *ViceVersa,* is played a lot; the last programs hardly at all.—RZ

THE KIDS SPEAK

We like *ViceVersa.* It is a fun game. It gives you lots of different choices for the games. Hard games. Easy games. You can make the game as hard as you want. The really hard game takes a long time to play because the computer has to think a lot between each move. We like it also because you can play it with another person.

Gladiator is fun. Some of it is. It has three different games. Space Shootout is the best. The ships are easy to hit and to move around. Football is okay. But it is hard to play. It is hard to complete passes. The Archery game is not much fun.

Lemonade Stand is okay to play. Lots of us can play at once. The noises it makes are neat. Especially the circus.

VideoArtist lets you draw stuff all over the screen. It also has one part where the computer draws stuff.

The *Music* program is hard to use. The part where you make up music is hard to use. The easy part is where you copy a song the computer plays. But it only has two songs to copy. It needs more.

Checkers took a while to understand how to play it. We only played a couple of times. We lost the games. You can only play against the computer. Can't play with a friend.

Pinball has lots of games. Sometimes the ball gets stuck. The score gets really big. We have to shut it off to stop it.

We didn't play *Blackjack* much. *Tennis* was a hard game to play.

The *Math* and *Word* games were hard to figure out what to do. They were not much fun.

We want more games where we can play the computer or each other. Also more like *ViceVersa* where you can make it as hard as you want. It is fun. Are there any new games?

Reviewed by Jjago Zamora, age 8, and Fante Zamora, age 9.

Announcements

Hardware

ATARI INTRODUCES
TWO PERSONAL COMPUTERS

Atari has introduced two new personal computer systems. They were designed for people with no prior computer experience as well as those with sophisticated needs and requirements.

The Atari line of personal computers will have a substantial library of computer software consisting of applications such as personal financial management, income tax preparation, household and office record-keeping and computer-aided instruction in more than 20 subject areas.

In the entertainment sphere, Atari will offer a sophisticated series of action and thinking games for one to four players, such as Basketball, Chess, Life, and a variety of simulation games including Kingdom, Lemonade Stand, Fur Trader and Stock Market. The Atari program library will be continuously expanded by a full-time staff of professional programmers.

The new Atari computers feature custom-integrated circuits for color graphics display, superior sound and music synthesis, slots for instantaneous use of preprogrammed solid-state cartridges, and compatibility with a custom tape recorder for program storage and retrieval. They are UL approved and con-

nect directly to a standard color or black-and-white television.

Both the ATARI-400™ (the general purpose system) and the ATARI-800™ (the specialized system) are programmable in BASIC. Other programming languages will become available on pre-programmed solid state cartridges.

The ATARI-400™ allows an easy transition from video games to full-fledged personal computing. The system features a 57-key monopanel keyboard, single-cartridge slot for solid-state programs of up to 8,000 bytes of memory, cassette recorder capability, and an internal audio speaker.

The specialized ATARI-800™ features dual-cartridge capability, user expandable random access memory up to 48,000 bytes, a series of optional peripheral devices including a high-speed floppy disk for mass data storage and retrieval, and a 40-column printer utilizing standard paper. The versatile and expandable nature of the ATARI-800™ system allows consumers to select components tailored to their specialized needs. Other peripheral devices, including telecommunications capabilities, are currently under development.

Software

EXIDY SORCERER
GETS GRAPHICS GAMES

Six graphics games for the Exidy Sorcerer are now available from Creative Computing Software. Some are old favorites; others are brand new. *LEM* is a lunar lander with graphics display and optional auto pilot; *Nuclear Reaction*, a non-violent game of skill in which two players alternately bombard an atom with protons and electrons until it reaches critical mass. In *Pie Lob*, two players take turns lobbing custard cream pies at each other over a sand castle. *Bounce* traces the path of a ball bouncing around the screen. In *Checkers*, the computer plays against you at the novice level. *Dodgem* requires

strategy to get your pieces across the board before your opponent does.

Order Sorcerer Graphics Games, Cat. No. CS-5001. The tape cassette, with instruction booklet, costs $7.95 (plus 75¢ postage) from Creative Computing Software, P.O. Box 789-M, Morristown, N.J., 07960.

NEW GAMES FOR OHIO
SCIENTIFIC SUPERBOARD II

A games tape which takes full advantage of the graphics capabilities of the computer is available for Ohio Scientific Superboard II/Challenger 1P.

It contains four games: *Dodgem*—use strategy to get your pieces off the opposite side of the board (one or two players); *Tank Attack*—seek and destroy enemy guns hidden among houses and trees before they get you (one player); *Free-for-all*—airplane, destroyer, and submarine vie to demolish each other (one or two players); *Hidden Maze*—find your way through an invisible maze with one-way gates (one or two players).

Order Cat. no. CS-6001. Tape cassette, instruction booklet, and box liner in hard plastic box available for $7.95 (plus 75¢ postage) from Creative Computing Software, P.O. Box 789-M, Morristown, NJ, 07960.

HAYDEN ANNOUNCES
CASSETTE LINE

Hayden Book Company has released a line of cassette programs compatible with the PET, TRS-80 Level I, TRS-80 Level II, KIM, Apple II, and Exidy Sorcerer personal computers.

Documentation is provided with each tape or in separate books with the same title.

The following programs are available at your local computer store:

How To Build a Computer-controlled Robot, $14.95. Features five control programs for a computerized robot:

joystick control, self-direction, impact sensor control, ultrasonic detection, and voice recognition. #00100 (KIM).

Game Playing with Basic, Tape 2, $9.95. Features 10 programs: *Knight's Tour, Guess the Number, Prime Numbers 1, Prime Numbers 2, Chinese Remainder Theorem, Perfect Numbers, Fibonacci Numbers, Amicable Numbers, Square Numbers, Armstrong Numbers.* #00301 (PET), #00302 (TRS-80 Level I), #00303 (TRS-80 Level II), #00304 (Apple II).

Game Playing with Basic, Tape 3, $9.95. Features 10 programs: *Slot Machines, Blackjack, Roll the Dice, Tower of Hanoi, 15 Puzzle, Buried Treasure, Odd Cell Magic Square, 4×4 Magic Square, Magic Square Starting With Any Number, Geometric Magic Square.* #00401 (PET), #00403 (TRS-80 Level II), #00404 (Apple II).

Sargon: A Computer Chess Program, $19.95. Features the complete program that won the 1978 West Coast Computer Faire Chess Tournament. #00603 (TRS-80 Level II).

The First Book of Kim, Tape 1, $9.95. Features these 14 recreational programs: *Addition, Asteroid, Bagels, Bandit, Blackjack, Bitz, Black Match, Card Dealer, Chess Clock, Clock, Code Test, Craps, Duel, Farmer Brown.* #00700 (KIM).

The First Book of Kim, Tape 2, $9.95. Features these 14 recreational programs: *Hi Lo, Horesrace, Key Train, KIM Nim, KIM-Tac-Toe, Lunar Lander, Multi-Maze, Music Box, Ping-Pong, Quick, Reverse, Teaser, Timer, Wumpus.* #00800 (KIM).

The First Book of Kim, Tape 3, $9.95. Features these 13 utility programs to make your KIM a more powerful machine: *Branch, Browse, Directory, Hypertape, Memory Test, Mini Dis, Movit, PLL Set, Relocate, Sort, Super Dup, Verify Tape, Vu Tape.* #00900 (KIM).

AUSTRALIANS OFFER NEW VERSION OF LOGO

The Elizabeth Computing Centre in Tasmania, Australia, is making its RSTS adaptation of LOGO available to other PDP-RSTS users.

The LOGO language was invented by Seymour Papert and his colleagues at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This version of LOGO is based in Papert's LOGO (which was designed for unusual peripherals) and supports the MIT Turtle, Tektronix 4006-1 and conventional terminals for turtle geometry.

LOGO forms a highly structured programming language based on a small set of primitives which are used by the programmer as building blocks to form complex procedures.

LOGO has been used successfully with primary school students as well as secondary and college levels.

LOGO is written in MACRO 11 and runs under RSTS Version 6C. For more information, contact Sandra Wills or John Gilbert at the following address: Elizabeth Computer Centre, 256-278 Elizabeth Street, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia 7000.

NEW MAILING SYSTEM DESIGNED FOR TRS-80

MAIL-III is a comprehensive mailing list system for Radio Shack's TRS-80 system. It consists of two programs. The first program lets you enter, display, search, update, delete name and address information. It also initializes the mailing list and displays system information, such as the maximum number of records allowed and number of records used.

The second program produces labels sorted in name, city, state or zip code order. Labels can be printed on the printer or displayed on the screen. A two-digit "select" code is used to identify an input session or to classify the people in your mailing list, such as doctors, commercial accounts, paid members, etc. You can print those labels that belong to a certain code or a specified range of codes, such as all the labels entered today.

You can put 500 names in a diskette—more if you have another drive—or use the diskette only as a data file. For an unlimited number of names, the mailing list can go on more than one diskette. The system is easy-to-use, comes with full documentation and step-by-step tutorial.

Diskette and 16K required. $35. A simplified cassette version requires 16K and Level II BASIC, and is sold for

$19. Write to: Micro Architect, 96 Dothan St., Arlington, MA 02174.

TEXT EDITORS FROM TSA SOFTWARE

These easy-to-use, on-screen text editors work on the normal video terminal already in your micro-system. Just pop in the disk and you're ready to key in manuscripts or read them from existing disk files. Simple commands allow you a full range of editing options.

DAISY allows you to add, delete or change the text by moving the cursor to the appropriate location, giving a simple command (often just one character), and typing in the change.

WPDAISY is the word processing version of this system, which includes both space and proportional justification. WPDAISY allows you to call disk files while formatting and has 26 in-memory buffers. Also included is a mail merge program, useful in producing form letters and labels.

The TSA/OS Version is $125 for DAISY; $300 for WPDAISY. The CPM Version is $175 for DAISY; $350 for WPDAISY.

Available from: TSA SOFTWARE, INC, 39 Williams Drive, Monroe, CT 06468, (203) 261-7963.

Other

COME ONE, COME ALL TO THE COMPUTER FAIRE

The fourth West Coast Computer Faire has issued a call for speakers, participants, and demonstrations. The Faire will be held in San Francisco's Civic Auditorium, May 11-13.

The Faire is primarily concerned with inexpensive computing for home, business, and industry. Some conference sessions will be directed to end users and address specific applications, while others will be of primary interest to business or technical professionals within the microcomputer industry.

Topics at past Faires have included games and tutorials for novices, educational computing and aids for the physically impaired, legal and financial aspects of computer manufacturing and retailing,